

# ***Council Bluffs Daily***

## ***Non Pareil***

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### **Great Places can be found right here in Iowa**

By TIM ROHWER, Staff Writer

It's one of the most exciting things to come out of state government.

That's how Anita Walker, director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, described the Great Places initiative.

"This is about recognizing the wonderful assets in Iowa and capitalizing on them," she said.

A Great Place can be a lake, a Victorian neighborhood, an historic building, anything, Walker said, but it's more than that.

"It's not so much the building as the story behind it," she said.

The initiative is designed to bring together the resources of state government and the creative ideas of citizens in a particular region, a community, even a neighborhood, to promote special features in that area.

"What's authentic, what's real, something with its own sense of identity," Walker said.

The obvious goal is to attract more people to the area to live, visit, to open up new businesses.

"To create wealth," Walker said.

To introduce people to this initiative, a series of forums will be held around the state, including one in Council Bluffs on May 19 at a place to be determined later.

The state's Great Places team, made up of representatives from 18 state agencies, will receive invitations by July 1 from places that want to pursue the initiative. Throughout July and August, Great Places "coaches" will work with these places to complete a presentation of their Great Places idea by September.

Then, on Oct. 1, a citizens advisory council appointed by Gov. Tom Vilsack will help select three pilot projects that will serve as a learning "laboratory" for the new program, Walker said.

A successful presentation should have broad community support for the idea and where there's a diverse selection of potential Great Places, she said.

Creativity in promoting Great Places is also important, Walker said.

At a recent meeting of representatives from state agencies, it was mentioned that the state's alcohol delivery trucks could be "moving billboards" where a local Great Places could be promoted, Walker said. Another idea was promoting Great Places on the state's lottery tickets, she said.

"It's one of the most exciting things coming out of state government," Walker said.